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Mr Davies
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Dear Mr Davies

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Evaluation of the impact of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies

I am grateful for the hospitality and co-operation of you and your staff during my visit with John Seal HMI on 12-13 October 2006 to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS).

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the SNS, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of continuity and progression for pupils on entry to secondary school.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observations of three English and four mathematics lessons.

The visit and findings took account of the context of the school and that the headteacher has been in post for just over 12 months. Furthermore, as from September 2006 there are newly appointed heads of department for English and mathematics.

The overall effectiveness and impact of the SNS was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

The impact of the strategy in raising standards and achievement is satisfactory.

- Standards at the school are good overall, although the rate of progress made by pupils is better between Key Stages 2 and 3 than it is between Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Progress made by some of the lower attaining pupils is limited.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities progress well because of the particularly effective additional support they receive.
- The effectiveness of the strategy in further developing pupils' personal development and well-being is good.

Quality of teaching and learning of subjects

The impact of the strategy at improving the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The school promotes good teaching and assessment for learning (AFL) effectively but the practice is not embedded throughout the school.
- There has been a recent increase in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum.
- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge in English and mathematics but a minority of the younger, higher attaining pupils are not always sufficiently challenged.
- The quality of planning is variable and sometimes weak.

Quality of curriculum

The effectiveness of the curriculum in raising achievement and improving teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The strategy has not influenced the changes to the curriculum at Key Stage 3. It does however reflect some of the best practice found at Key Stage 4.
- The lack of resources in ICT have up until recently compromised the school's ability to make effective use of this resource across the curriculum.
- The cramped conditions within some classrooms limit the curriculum provision in some areas.

Leadership and management of the Secondary National Strategy

There is good leadership of the strategy provided from within the senior management of the school.

- Not all middle managers and teaching staff are taking sufficient responsibility for leading improvements.
- The role and responsibilities of the newly appointed heads of departments require further development.
- The school is making effective use of data to track and monitor pupils' progress and identify underachievement.
- All departments are now contributing to whole school self-evaluation, even though some aspects still lack a degree of rigour.

The quality of transition to secondary school

The overall quality of transition from primary to secondary school is good. The school provides effective care, guidance and support to pupils and their parents. This helps to ensure the smooth and effective transition for pupils from Year 6 to Year 7.

- Academic and pastoral information is shared effectively between schools.
- Although the school collects a good range of data about pupils, this information is not used consistently well to inform planning and teaching of Year 7 pupils.
- The school makes good use of the information it gathers about pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and it liaises well with other agencies.
- Students feel well looked after and happy within the first half of the autumn term. The field trip to Wales which takes place early in the autumn contributes effectively to positive relationships, team building and levels of confidence and self-esteem.

Inclusion

The effectiveness of the strategy in promoting inclusion is good. The list of pupil's needs is well documented and shared with teachers.

- Some of the intervention materials are used well with withdrawal groups, although during lessons, support is inconsistent.
- The management of transfer for vulnerable pupils and those with a statement of special educational need is especially good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the rate of progress made by pupils between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4
- embedding assessment for learning and good quality teaching and marking throughout the school
- ensuring that planning and teaching specify learning outcomes more clearly and that where possible lessons are presented in a meaningful context
- further developing the role of middle managers so they are more accountable for school improvement within their area of responsibility
- ensuring that self-evaluation procedures are consistently robust and include a sharper focus on standards and progress in the monitoring of lessons.

We also discussed the challenges faced by staff and pupils who use classrooms which are too small, as well as the constraints placed on the school by not being allowed to lease ICT equipment from its devolved capital budget.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the SNS in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector